

PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTIONS OF PLATFORM-BASED VOCATIONAL SKILLS TO YOUTH EMPOWERMENT IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

Youth unemployment and underemployment pose severe socio-economic threats in Lagos State, acting as major catalyst for economic helplessness, frustration, and rising social vices such as cultism, drug abuse, cybercrime, and street violence. As formal labor opportunities remain constrained, platform-based vocational skills such as graphic design, digital illustration, videography, animation, digital marketing, and tech-enabled crafts have emerged as crucial instruments for fostering self-reliance, youth empowerment, and economic inclusion. This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised young adults engaged in digital vocational learning and micro-enterprises in Lagos State. A sample of 60 respondents was drawn using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a 30-item structured questionnaire titled *Platform-Based Vocational Skills Questionnaire (PBVSI-MUVYL)*, designed on a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure instrument validity, the questionnaire was validated by experts in Visual Arts Education. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, simple percentages, mean scores ($\bar{X}$), and standard deviations (SD), with a benchmark mean of 3.00 for decision-making. The findings revealed high availability of platform-based vocational training domains (Grand Mean = 4.30, $SD = 0.76$). The findings also established that platform-based vocational skills effectively empower youth (Grand Mean = 4.22, $SD = 0.70$). However, structural bottlenecks significantly impede training progress (Grand Mean = 4.07, $SD = 0.75$), with high data costs and personal online motivation difficulties emerging as primary constraints. The study concluded that platform-based vocational skill acquisition is a viable, sustainable mechanism for tackling youth unemployment and reducing street restiveness in urban Lagos. Consequently, it is recommended that the Lagos State Government partner with telecommunications providers to provide zero-rated educational data bundles as well as establishing solar-powered community digital learning hubs across Local Government Areas.

Keywords: *Platform-based vocational skills, Youth unemployment, Youth violence, Empowerment, Digital learning, Lagos State.*

Introduction

Lagos State, often regarded as Nigeria's commercial engine and one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest megacities, continues to witness rapid urban expansion, population influx, and commercial growth. Yet, beneath this dynamic economic landscape lies a structural crisis: widespread youth unemployment and underemployment. Technically defined, unemployment refers to a situation where individuals within the working-age demographic (typically 15 to 35 years for youth) are without work, actively seeking employment, and currently available to take up paid jobs

(International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Conversely, underemployment occurs when young people are engaged in work that fails to fully utilize their skills, educational qualifications, or time capacity often resulting in low pay, irregular hours, and zero income security.

While macro-level metrics from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024) report a baseline youth unemployment rate of 6.5%, this figure hides severe structural underutilization. More than 93% of employed young Nigerians work in the informal sector where jobs are often insecure poorly paid and have low productivity.

Across urban centers like Lagos, underemployment is visible on every street: tertiary graduates managing Point of Sale (POS) kiosks, secondary school leavers hawking goods in gridlock traffic (go-slow) along the Ikeja-Oshodi expressway, or young adults serving as informal loaders and touts (agberos) in busy motor parks. Although these informal jobs help people survive, they often do not provide decent incomes, career growth or financial security.

In response to these traditional employment bottlenecks, the emergence of digital technologies and platform-based vocational training has introduced new pathways for youth empowerment and income generation. Modern platform-based skills such as graphic design, videography, animation, digital illustration, social media management, digital marketing, and tech-enabled fashion design offer viable alternatives to traditional labor markets. According to UNESCO (2021), digital and vocational skill development plays a vital role in reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion.

In addition, online vocational education allows young people in urban Lagos to overcome local infrastructure challenges and access job opportunities in Nigeria and around the world. (World Bank, 2023). By equipping young people with practical, high-demand competencies, platform-based learning transforms vulnerable, underemployed youths into self-reliant entrepreneurs and productive creators. This study examines the perceived contributions of platform-based vocational skills to youth empowerment in Lagos state.

Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the platform-based vocational skills reportedly available to participating youths in Lagos State.
2. Assess participants' perceived contribution of platform-based vocational training to economic self-reliance and entrepreneurial confidence.
3. Examine the perceived infrastructural, financial, instructional, and personal barriers to platform-based vocational training.

Research Questions

1. What platform-based vocational skills are reportedly available to participating youths in Lagos state?
2. What are the participants' perceptions of the contribution of platform-based vocational training to economic self-reliance and entrepreneurial confidence?
3. What infrastructural, financial, instructional, and personal barriers do participants perceive as hindering their participation in platform-based vocational training?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **Empowerment Theory**, pioneered by Marc Zimmerman (1995). Empowerment theory explains how individuals, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives, acquire critical resources, and build the competencies needed to improve their socio-economic standing. The theory posits that socio-economic vulnerabilities such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization stem primarily from restricted access to opportunities and productive tools. Zimmerman (1995) notes that empowerment operates across three interconnected levels:

- a) **Individual Level:** Focuses on building personal self-efficacy, technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and confidence.
- b) **Organizational Level:** Provides supportive networks, learning platforms, and resources that foster skill acquisition.
- c) **Community Level:** Encourages collective participation, social stability, and economic resilience

In the context of youth development, Empowerment Theory emphasizes that equipping young people with practical knowledge, economic opportunities, and digital tools lower their susceptibility to anti-social behaviors and violence. When young individuals acquire marketable, platform-based vocational skills (such as coding, digital marketing, or media production), they secure pathways toward income generation and

financial independence. Consequently, empowerment reduces the economic helplessness and frustration that often fuel youth restiveness and street violence in urban centers like Lagos.

Concept of Vocational Skills

Vocational skills are hands on experience, technical knowledge, and expertise acquired by person for specific occupations, trades, or professions. These skills are learned through specialized training, apprenticeship, practical instruction, or technical education with the purposed of preparing individuals for gainful employment or employer of labour. It focuses mainly on practical application required for specific jobs and productive activities. It emphasizes what a person can do practically to add value in the workplace.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, vocational education involves the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills, attitudes, and competencies related to various occupations in different sectors of economic and social life (UNESCO, 2021). This implies that vocational skills are not limited to manual trades alone but also include digital and technological competencies that support modern economic activities.

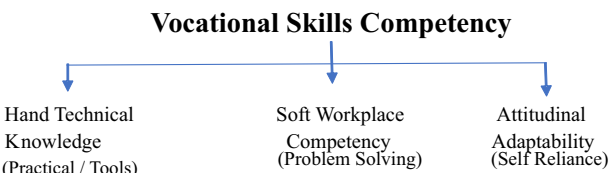


Figure 1. Illustration showing Vocational Skills Competency

Vocational skills can be technical based that are required to generate the product or service of the company. These capabilities span industry specific operations, design, communications, and environmental observation, research and development. Hysong (2008) claims that technical skills can be used to develop expertise in carrying out manual or digital jobs. In other hand it can be innovative based which capitalized on fresh concept to advance the society or economy. The capacity to think creatively, problem solve effectively and have functional or technical skills are all components

of innovation capabilities (Graham – Leviss, 2016). An organization must consistently innovate to succeed and realize its full potential. Vocational skills help bridge the gap between formal education and labour market demands.

Okoro (2010) explained that vocational skills equip individuals with employable competencies needed for productive work and self-employment. Similarly, Odu (2011) noted that vocational skills training provide individuals with practical knowledge necessary for occupational efficiency and national development. Vocational skills can be acquired formally through technical institutions, vocational centres, polytechnics, and universities, or informally through apprenticeship systems and online learning platforms. Traditionally, vocational skills in Nigeria included tailoring, carpentry, welding, hairdressing, textile design, pottery, and other craft-related occupations. However, the advancement of digital technology has expanded vocational opportunities to include graphic design, web development, photography, digital marketing, animation, coding, video editing, and content creation.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to assess the availability, effectiveness, and challenges of platform-based vocational training. The target population comprised youth residing within the Lagos metropolis who actively engage in platform-based vocational training or micro-enterprises. A sample size of 60 respondents was selected using a simple random sampling technique across urban hubs in Lagos State. Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire titled Platform-Based Vocational Skills Questionnaire (PBVSI-MUVYL). The instrument contained 30 items structured into three distinct thematic sections aligned with the study's objectives. The Instrument was reviewed by experts in Visual Arts Education to establish content validity and structural clarity. Responses were scored using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Neutral (N) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1). Data collected from the 60 respondents were analyzed using

frequency counts, percentages, mean scores (X), and standard deviations (SD). A benchmark means score of 3.00 was established as the threshold for acceptance. Items with mean scores of 3.00 and above were interpreted as agreeing with the statement, while mean scores below 3.00 indicated disagreement.

Results and Discussion

Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile of Respondents (N = 60)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	32	53.3
	Female	28	46.7
Age Group (years)	18 -22	14	23.3
	23 -27	27	45.0
	28 –32	13	21.7
	33 35	6	10.0
Highest Educational Level	Secondary school	11	18.3
	NCE/OND	19	31.7
	HND/B.Sc/B.Ed	26	43.3
	Postgraduate/Others	4	6.7
Primary Employment Status	Unemployed	16	26.7
	(Searching for Job)		
	Underemployed (Part - time/informal street job)	21	35.0
	Self-Employed	18	30.0
	Wage Employed	5	8.3
Monthly Income Range (NGN)	Below #30,000	18	30.0
	#30,000 - #60,000	23	38.3
	#61,000 - #100,000	13	21.7
	Above #100,000	6	10.0
Primary Digital Device Used	Smartphone only	31	51.7
	Laptop/PC only	9	15.0
	Both Smartphone and Laptop	20	33.3

The demographic and socioeconomic distribution of the respondents presented in Table 1 provides important context regarding the sample composition and the transferability of the study findings. Out of the 60 sampled respondents, 32 (53.3%) were male, while 28 (46.7%) were female. This balanced representation indicates that both male and female youths in Lagos State are actively seeking platform-based vocational training to achieve financial self-reliance. The socioeconomic profile shows that the sample consists primarily of educated, underemployed, and mobile-reliant young adults navigating an informal economy.

Research Question 1: What platform-based vocational skills are reportedly available to participating youths in Lagos state?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation in Responses of Respondents on Platform-Based Vocational Skills Available to Youths (N= 60)

S/N	Vocational Skills Availability Statement	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Online graphic design Training	24	29	3	0	4	4.15	1.02
2	Videographer training	33	19	8	0	0	4.42	0.72
3	Fashion design and tailoring tutorials	30	26	3	1	0	4.42	0.67
4	Photography skills training	31	20	9	0	0	4.37	0.74
5	Digital marketing and Social media management	22	33	2	0	3	4.18	0.91
6	Cosmetology make -up artistry and beauty care	16	25	16	0	3	3.85	0.99
7	Entrepreneurship and business management	27	28	5	0	0	4.37	0.64
8	Craft-related skills (Bead making/leatherwork)	24	29	7	0	0	4.28	0.67
9	Animation, content, and multimedia	31	20	9	0	0	4.37	0.74
10	Digital illustration and animation access	35	24	1	0	0	4.57	0.53
Grand Mean							4.30	0.76

The data presented in Table 2 reveals that digital platforms offer a wide array of vocational training alternatives to youth in Lagos State, as evidenced by a remarkably high grand mean of 4.30. The highest-rated item under this objective was Item 10 (“Digital illustration and animation access”), which recorded a mean score of 4.57 and a low standard deviation of 0.53, indicating strong consensus among respondents. This is closely followed by videography (Mean = 4.42) and fashion design/tailoring tutorials (Mean = 4.42). Even the lowest-rated vocational skill domain, cosmetology and makeup artistry (Item 6), still scored comfortably above the standard threshold with a mean of 3.85. Hence, the respondents generally obliged to all the questionnaire items.

Table 3: Participants Perception of the contribution of platform-based vocational training to economic self-reliance and entrepreneurial confidence (N=60)

Items	Participants Perception	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Improved my ability to earn an income	21	33	6	0	0	4.25	0.63
2	Increased my self-reliance	29	22	9	0	0	4.33	0.73
3	Provides practical knowledge for job market	26	33	1	0	0	4.42	0.53
4	Aligns with current market demand	22	37	1	0	0	4.35	0.52
5	Improved my entrepreneurial abilities	25	28	7	0	0	4.30	0.67
6	Increased my confidence in starting a business	30	24	6	0	0	4.40	0.67
7	Improved my overall standard of living	17	34	7	2	0	4.10	0.73
8	Expanded my employment and business networks	18	30	4	8	0	3.97	0.96
9	Reduced financial dependence on others	20	26	3	11	0	3.92	1.06
10	Is an effective tool for socio-economic empowerment	20	30	10	0	0	4.17	0.69
Grand Mean							4.22	0.70

Table 3 outlines the perceptual indicators regarding how effectively these digital skills transform the economic lives of the youth. The cumulative assessment is highly favorable, with a grand mean of 4.22. Specifically, Item 3 (“Provides practical knowledge for job market”) achieved the highest agreement level with a mean of 4.42. Similarly, item 6 had a mean of 4.40 showing that respondents strongly agreed that platform-based training increased their confidence to launch personal businesses. Furthermore, tangible economic benefits are visible in Item 1 (“Improved income generation”) and Item 2 (“Increased self-reliance”), with mean scores of 4.25 and 4.33, respectively. While variables measuring networking (Item 8, Mean = 3.97) and total financial independence (Item 9, Mean = 3.92) have slightly wider variations in responses (Std Dev > 0.90), they still reflect positive impact.

Table 4: Barriers Participants Perceive as Hindering their Participation in Platform-Base Vocational Training (N = 60)

Items	Barriers to Vocational Training	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Poor internet connectivity hinders training	23	32	5	0	0	4.28	0.61
2	High cost of internet subscription/data	36	22	1	0	1	4.53	0.70
3	Lack of digital devices (laptops/smart phones)	30	23	3	4	0	4.32	0.85
4	Inadequate digital literacy among trainees	25	23	11	1	0	4.20	0.80
5	Frequent electricity outages	25	24	5	0	6	4.03	1.19
6	Limited practical or hands-on experience	0	0	60	0	0	3.00	0.00
7	Lack of real-time instructor interaction	19	32	3	0	6	3.97	1.13
8	Inadequate learning support and mentorship	6	41	7	6	0	3.78	0.76
9	Difficulty maintaining personal motivation	34	24	2	0	0	4.53	0.57
10	General financial constraints for enrollment	18	32	3	7	0	4.02	0.91
	Grand Mean						4.07	0.75

Data analysis in Table 4 on barriers hindering effective participation in platform-based vocational training. showed that respondents generally obliged to almost all the questionnaire items, suggesting that poor internet connectivity, high cost of internet subscription/data, lack of digital devices (laptops/smart phones) etc are major hindrances to effective utilization platform-based vocational training. This is evidenced from the grand mean of 4.07

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to examine the availability, effectiveness, and structural bottlenecks of platform-based vocational skills as an instrument for mitigating youth unemployment and social vulnerability in Lagos State. The empirical data obtained by analyzing research question 1

shows a robust deployment of diverse vocational training platforms across digital spaces in Lagos State, with an overall grand mean of 4.30. Contemporary digital skills such as animation, digital illustration, graphic design, and social media management are widely accessible alongside digitized traditional vocations like fashion design and craftwork. This finding aligns with the perspectives of Bello and Adeleke (2022), who noted that African urban centers are experiencing an unprecedented migration of vocational studies from physical workshops to cloud-based storage systems. Similarly, Oviawe (2023) observed that technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Nigeria is undergoing a massive digital restructuring. The high availability score for specialized digital content creation fields further emphasizes the arguments of Adebayo (2024), who pointed out that the platform economy within Lagos State relies heavily on self-taught virtual professionals who utilize open-source video and design platforms to achieve industrial competency.

The study also found that platform-based skills acquisition significantly improved individual empowerment, leading to economic and social transformation with a grand mean of 4.22. Trainees expressed substantial agreement that these platforms provide highly practical market knowledge and boost their self-reliance and confidence to establish personal enterprises. This finding supports the human capital development theories articulated by Ogundele and Oyelere (2021), who proved that targeted micro-skills learned through digital means offer a faster, and a more productive pathway to income generation. Furthermore, Rufai et al. (2023) emphasized that when youths acquire immediate digital capabilities, their vulnerability to local gang recruitment and electoral violence drops substantially because their time and financial dependencies are constructively occupied.

Despite the many benefits of platform-based digital skills highlighted, the research exposes severe environmental and infrastructural barriers that limit the long-term success of

virtual learners. The data highlights that high internet data subscription costs and poor internet connectivity are major barriers, along with constant power outages. These findings align with the assertion of Adeniran and Onwuka (2023), who argued that the high cost of telecommunications in Nigeria creates an additional financial burden for disadvantaged youths seeking online self-improvement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that platform-based vocational training has shifted from a temporary alternative into a vital tool for economic survival and social stability among youths in Lagos State. The data clearly shows that digital platforms offer a rich variety of both modern technical skills and traditional craft tutorials. When youths engage with these platforms, they gain practical, market-relevant knowledge that directly boosts their earning capacity, self-reliance, and business confidence.

However, the research also shows that these digital empowerment efforts are heavily limited by structural barriers. High data costs, unreliable power supply, lack of proper devices, and the isolation of online learning create a difficult environment for trainees. If these challenges are left unaddressed, the great potential of online vocational skills to reduce youth unemployment and lower community violence will remain out of reach for the very youth who need it most.

Recommendations

Based on the research questions and the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a) The Lagos State Ministry of Science and Technology, in partnership with major telecommunications providers (such as MTN, Airtel, and Glo), should implement zero-rated or deeply subsidized "educational data bundles" specifically for verified youth users accessing accredited vocational training websites and applications.
- b) To address the combined challenges of

high data costs, lack of laptops, and erratic power supply, the Lagos State Government should set up solar-powered youth vocational centers across local government areas. These spaces should provide free high-speed internet access and computers, allowing trainees to study in a stable, collaborative environment.

- c) Creators and administrators of online vocational programs should adopt a blended learning framework in a way that will help reduce isolation, maintain trainee motivation, and improve course completion rates.

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